Local Government Should Share and Share Alike

I will confess that I did not used to be a fan of sharing IT. But, that was a different time, and it was before we had so many options and the experience of some pioneers to show us the way. Now, I believe it can be key to governmental survival and, it may be a way to have a great and better IT team than ever before.

The shared services model in government IT has really started to take off. If you haven't been following it, here are the basics. Governmental entities, like counties and cities, departments across state or federal government or neighboring counties, have started to share. They are sharing IT hardware and hosting, expertise around solutions in a consultative or service provider way, and they are even sharing processing times and the purchase of software applications.

What does this sharing look like?

Well, it got its start in "the overlap." By that I mean that government services, processes and impacts often overlap – between agencies, between county and city and between a kind of government activity.

That impacts their constituents. One example is a purchasing process. Government purchases things from paper to paperclips to vehicles to services. It generally follows a similar process to approve purchases, match the approval with an invoice and match the invoice with a receipt that says the purchased good has been received. What if your county neighbor has figured out a way to automate parts of this process so that it can speed up this process and focus its staff on exceptions to ensure that bills are accurate and accurately paid? And, what if you could hire that county to process your bills using this great system they figured out?

Sometimes multiple agencies are involved in a process. A great example is public safety where enforcement and investigation start at a police department or sheriff's department, progress to prosecutors and on to courts. Because they share documents, it makes sense that they might share a system that securely stores those documents. And, their processes can speed up if they are no longer waiting for documents to arrive because the central storage option -- whose cost might be shared -- is available to all appropriate users in this multi-agency system.

What if a county and a city could share their online services portal or Web site? The shared site would make it easier for constituents to access the services they need, and it could be accomplished by sharing the IT expertise that creates the Web site. Even the hosting of the site could be shared. Since this both simplifies government's face to its constituents and leverages the expertise and IT infrastructure investments, it is a win-win. And, it produces the very rare occurrence of improved constituent service at a lower cost.

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Finally, what if you could share the ECM solution they were using to automate purchasing, store documents or manage online service routing? And, what if you could save the cost of that software while leveraging their expertise? That's sharing services, and that's great for government because it leverages IT investment and expertise and expands good government.

Vendors, like those providing enterprise content management solutions, are supporting this trend with smart pricing that helps government entities embrace document management and workflow without forcing them to buy redundant systems and recreating the same workflow processes again and again.

So, just as we were taught by our moms, dads and teachers— sharing **is good**, and when it comes to government, sharing means better constituent service, access to expertise, hardware, software and experience, and reduced government costs.

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